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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 HARARE 001004

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/08/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: MUGABE STRONG DESPITE DISSENSION WITHIN ZANU-PF;
MDC DIVISIONS MORE DAMAGING

REF: HARARE 795

HARARE 00001004 001.2 OF 005

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Glenn Warren. Reason: 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: While much can happen between today and the 2008 elections, the current situation appears to favor continued rule by President Robert Mugabe. Mugabe, despite significant sentiment within ZANU-PF that he step down, maintains firm control of ZANU-PF and observers expect him to emerge from his party's Extraordinary Congress in December as ZANU-PF's candidate for president. The MDC meanwhile finds itself in turmoil after a decision to dissolve the Women's Assembly and depose its leader, Lucia Matebenga. The continued MDC factional split, and this fracture within the Tsvangirai faction, raise doubts about the MDC's ability to

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mount a strong challenge in next year's elections, even if a SADC-sponsored agreement resulting in a more electoral playing field is implemented on the ground. Other scenarios, such as a serious third party challenge or a military coup, appear unlikely. The most likely scenario at this point in time is a Mugabe electoral victory in 2008. When and if he would subsequently step down and what would follow a Mugabe exit is unclear. End Summary.

Mugabe in Control

¶2. (C) There is widespread opposition to Mugabe within ZANU-PF, primarily because of his mismanagement of the economy. Last year, the Mujuru faction was able to stop his

bid at the annual party conference to extend his term until 2010. Their opposition also prevented party endorsement for his 2008 presidential candidacy at the ZANU-PF Politburo and Central Committee meetings in March. Attempting to build on this political success and deal a political death blow to Mugabe, the Mujuru faction during the last several months has tried to win support within party provincial executive committees. By all accounts, these efforts have failed, and the Mujurus have conceded Mugabe's endorsement at an Extraordinary Congress in December.

13. (C) As part of his sidelining of erstwhile allies Solomon Mujuru and (Mujuru's wife) Vice President Joice Mujuru, Mugabe rehabilitated Emmerson Mnangagwa who had fallen out of grace after the alleged Tsholotsho plot against Mugabe in 2005, and stirred rumors that Mnangagwa might be his anointed successor. In October, Mnangagwa, legal secretary for the party, announced that the agenda for the Extraordinary Congress would only include ratification of the harmonization of presidential, provincial, and local elections in 2008; ratification of the reduction of the presidential term from six to five years; and support for the dissolution of Parliament in 2008 to allow for parliamentary elections in 2008 rather than in 2010 as scheduled. As leader of the party, Mugabe is the presumptive party nominee--the restrictive Congress agenda allows no opportunity for nomination of other candidates.

14. (C) Mugabe has maintained his control of ZANU-PF through patronage and fear. Although the shrinking economy has reduced the benefits that can be parceled out to the party faithful, there is still enough in the trough to produce loyalty. Perhaps more important is the fear engendered by Mugabe that 1) his departure could result in internecine party struggle jeopardizing the relative stability of Zimbabwe and the ill-gotten gains of party members; and 2) that anyone challenging him will be marginalized. Solomon Mujuru, because of his stature, did challenge Mugabe within the past year, but, as noted, failed. Moderates such as

HARARE 00001004 002.2 OF 005

former finance minister Simba Makoni have been afraid to openly oppose Mugabe; with the exception of a handful of ZANU-PF dissidents such as publisher and businessman Ibbo Mandaza and Mugabe's former comrade in arms Edgar Tekere, there has been no public criticism of Mugabe from ZANU-PF.

15. (C) Mugabe's ZANU-PF critics anticipate a Mugabe victory in next year's election, and hope he will then step down due to any or all of the following factors; age, health problems (as reported in Reftel, Mugabe allegedly told his physician he would leave after the election due to a throat cancer condition), and pressures from his party to allow someone else to deal with the ever-collapsing economy. Also, they believe he may agree to leave office if an election victory is recognized by the international community as legitimate, giving him the political legitimacy he has long sought.

MDC Faces More Division

16. (C) The MDC decided at the end of October to dissolve its Women's Assembly 24-member executive. According to MDC insiders, the decision (which stripped Lucia Matibenga, also a vice-president of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), of her position of Assembly chair) was made because of the ineffectiveness of the Assembly in recruiting and mobilizing women. There was also concern about the Assembly's finances and concern that it had been infiltrated by ZANU-PF. Matibenga and her supporters claimed the action was without foundation and done extra-constitutionally. An MDC Congress in Bulawayo subsequently elected Theresa Makone, wife of MDC Director of Elections and Tsvangirai confidante Ian Makone, as the new chair. Counter-claims flies. Matibenga claimed she and her supporters were barred entry to the Congress that elected Makone; Matibenga opponents

insinuated that she had bussed her supporters to Bulawayo with ZANU-PF funds.

¶7. (C) Regardless of leglities and merits of the positions of the respective sides, there are now deep divisions within th Tsvangirai faction. Eliphas Mukonewushuro, the MC's shadow foreign minister and a longtime Tsvanirai advisor, told us that party members were anry at Tsvangirai, that Tsvangirai was concerned nly about gaining power, and that

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Tsvangirai had acted worse than Mugabe. Much of the

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resentment appears to stem from the fact that Tsvangirai and his inner circle have not, until at least recently, briefed the MDC executive on the progress of the SADC negotiations and there is consequently a lack of confidence in what is being achieved. The criticism of Tsvangirai is biting because it is similar to that levied against him in 2005, prior to the MDC split, when he decided that the party should not contest Senate seats.

¶8. (C) Jameson Timba, one of Tsvangirai's kitchen cabinet argued to us that there were legitimate concerns about Matibenga and her management of the Women's Assembly, and that the MDC had acted legally in dissolving it. However, he admitted that for political reasons he had argued against the action, having foreseen the consequences. Tsvangirai gave an interview to the Financial Gazette to explain his actions and, according to Timba, was planning to talk to all MDC executive committee members to try to smooth over the crisis. Timba thought he would be largely successful. Tsvangirai told Charge he was currently focused on resolving MDC dissension, which he hoped would be achieved before the end of November. Only then, he said, would he be able to shift into full campaign mode.

¶9. (C) Perhaps most problematic is the fact that some civil

HARARE 00001004 003 OF 005

society women's groups showing solidarity with Matibenga, have criticized the MDC and the way the matter has been handled. It is unlikely that the split could lead to Matibenga and others forming another party. The danger, though, is that this latest controversy compounds doubts engendered by the continuing split between the Tsvangirai and Mutambara factions about the MDC's effectiveness. Party structures weakened by the climate of violence will be challenged to overcome apathy among many of the MDC's traditional supporters resulting from continuing intraparty conflicts.

No Third Way

¶10. (C) Several prominent Zimbabweans, among them Johannesburg business magnate Strive Masiyiwa, Johannesburg and Harare publisher Trevor Ncube, and Zimbabwean parliamentarian and former ZANU-PF insider Jonathan Moyo, have for some time been pushing the idea of a third party. Opponents of ZANU-PF, they are skeptical of MDC leadership and strength and are looking for a candidate who can transcend the present political situation to head a party composed of ZANU-PF moderates and MDC defectors. Two names they have focused on are Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono and Simba Makoni.

¶11. (C) Neither is realistic at this time. Gono has presided over a disastrous economy and has no support outside of his Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. Makoni is potentially the most popular politician in Zimbabwe. He has a reputation for integrity--he resigned from his position as finance minister rather than carry out dysfunctional policies, and he actually bought his farm--and historically he has had good relations

with the international community. But he remains a ZANU-PF loyalist and, although he has criticized the government from within, he has been afraid to publicly speak out on Zimbabwe's crisis. It is perhaps a measure of Mugabe's control and the climate of fear that for some time Makoni, as well as some other moderates, have been afraid to meet with us. At this point in time, there does not appear to be a leader with the prominence and support to lead a third party.

A Military Coup?

¶12. (C) Although the possibility of a military coup can not be entirely discounted, and the military unquestionably has the capacity to force Mugabe out, we are skeptical of this scenario. While there is growing discomfort among all strata of society with the current political and economic situation, there are compelling reasons why top military leaders would not take action. They have been close to Mugabe since the beginnings of the liberation struggle and have supported him for many years. They continue to receive ZANU-PF patronage and, despite deteriorating economic conditions, they continue to thrive. Finally, military leaders are aware that it is doubtful that the SADC region, which has been tolerant of Mugabe, would accept a coup.

¶13. (C) There is dissatisfaction among the military rank and file who have low salaries, who are occasionally not paid, and who receive meager food rations. There are reports of growing numbers of desertions. So far the government has been able to provide sufficient emoluments, but as the economic situation makes this increasingly difficult, the military as a whole could become a less reliable source of

HARARE 00001004 004 OF 005

support for the regime.

SADC Negotiations and the Way Forward

¶14. (C) Mugabe has made concessions in the SADC negotiations because he is hoping an agreement will result in a resumption of international assistance, and because he hopes that the election will confer legitimacy on him. His calculation is to give enough so that the election will be considered free and fair, but not so much that he loses control of the outcome.

¶15. (C) The MDC's goal of course is a level electoral playing field. In addition to an agreement that covers electoral reform and reform of AIPPA and POSA, a political atmosphere free of violence, intimidation, and food manipulation is essential. The success of the negotiations must be judged by guarantees in these areas and ultimately by the facts on the ground. If the MDC proceeds to an election without a fair political environment, it risks not only losing but helping to legitimize the election. If on the other hand, it withdraws from the election, it runs the risk of handing the election to ZANU-PF, allowing ZANU-PF to claim it won a fair election that the MDC for its own reasons decided to boycott, and failing to expose the full nature of ZANU-PF's electoral perfidy.

¶16. (C) For the MDC to have a chance of winning the 2008 election, a number of factors, some of them unlikely, must coalesce. Electoral reform must be implemented, including a cleansing of the voters' rolls and the creation of an independent electoral commission. Intimidation, violence, and manipulation of food aid must cease, and ZANU-PF political structures, particularly in the rural areas must be controlled, so that the MDC can organize and campaign. The MDC must also have the resources to permit it to organize and campaign. Elections must be postponed to give the MDC the

opportunity to take advantage of reforms and a changed atmosphere. (Tsvangirai has publicly stated that March is far too early; Mugabe has insisted elections will occur in March. This could be a deal breaker in the SADC negotiations.) And the MDC must form an electoral coalition of its two factions, in order to combat voter apathy nationwide and avoid splitting votes in Matabeleland (where several Mutambara-faction MPs enjoy substantial popularity).

After the Election

¶17. (C) Zimbabwe is in a transition that will ultimately lead to the end of Mugabe's rule, even if at the moment a Mugabe defeat in 2008 elections appears unlikely. Alternative scenarios for transition are full of uncertainty, starting with whether Mugabe would step down following an election victory or cling to power. It is also difficult to predict the framework of a post-Mugabe government. ZANU-PF could splinter without Mugabe to hold its members together, leaving an opening for a third force perhaps including the MDC. Or the MDC could align with one of the existing ZANU-PF factions to form a government of national unity. The worst case scenario is political disintegration, a power vacuum, and possible civil conflict.

¶18. (C) One reason for optimism is the fact that, despite its rhetoric about sanctions, most ZANU-PF leaders realize that the cause of Zimbabwe's predicament is the regime's mismanagement of the economy. Many understand that recovery

HARARE 00001004 005 OF 005

is dependent on economic reform and international reengagement, and that international reengagement is dependent on political reform.

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